

The Social Construction of Intertextuality and Literary Understanding: The Impact of Interactive Read-Alouds on the Writing of Third Graders During Writing Workshop

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We know that when students write, they compose a written text that consciously and unconsciously embodies traces of the many texts they have previously experienced during their lives. Intertextually informed writing studies have illustrated that students' writing not only reflects literary and written texts they have experienced in the past (Bearse, 1992; Cairney, 1990; Pantaleo, 2006; Sipe, 1993) but also the texts of their previous conversations, popular culture, and life experiences (Dyson, 1993, 1997; Kamberelis & McGinley, 1992; Short, 1992). During writing instruction, particularly writing workshop, teachers frequently read children's literature aloud in order to have book authors serve as mentors for students' writing. Writing scholars suggest that as children listen to and discuss literature during read-alouds, they internalize the features of quality writing and begin to use these features in their own writing (Calkins, 1994; Harwayne, 1992, 2001; Ray, 1999; Smith, 1983).

During interactive read-alouds, students socially construct meaning as they dialogically interact with the text, their classmates, and their teacher throughout the reading of the book (Barrentine, 1996). Despite extensive anecdotal reporting of the significance of reading children's literature aloud within writing workshop (Calkins, 1994; Harwayne, 1992; Ray, 1999), surprisingly no empirical studies have been conducted on the intertextual connections students construct between the dialogue that occurs during interactive read-alouds (Barrentine, 1996; Fisher, Flood, Lapp, and Frey, 2004)

and their writing within writing workshop. In addition, while research has focused on the significance of oral responses and intertextual connections during interactive read-alouds in the development of students' literary understanding and meaning making (Sipe 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2008), none of these studies has addressed how these responses during read-alouds might impact students' writing.

This six-month descriptive, naturalistic study examined the intertextual connections third-grade students constructed between interactive read-alouds of mentor texts at the beginning of writing workshop and their writing during writing workshop. The overarching research question for this study was, How do the texts within interactive read-alouds at the beginning of writing workshop mentor children's writing? Guiding questions for this study included the following:

- What texts have students borrowed, adapted, appropriated, or transformed into their writing during writing workshop?
- How does students' writing reflect the texts present in interactive read-alouds at the beginning of writing workshop?
- How does a teacher facilitate intertextual connections between reading and writing?

I conducted this study in a third-grade classroom in a public charter school (kindergarten through eighth grade) located in an urban school district in a large

northeastern city in the United States. Children's literature formed the foundation of the literacy curriculum. Teachers collaboratively developed their units of study focusing on best practice instruction that was standards-based, conceptual, and empowering. The 14 third graders within this classroom included 1 Asian, 3 Hispanic, and 10 African American students. The classroom teacher strongly believed in the integration of reading and writing, provided students with authentic literacy experiences, and interactively read aloud at least three times each day.

Over six months, I observed writing workshop 33 times and collected multiple data sources, including observational field notes, transcriptions, informal and semistructured interviews, and student and teacher artifacts. I collected over 150 pages of detailed, descriptive field notes used to clarify and supplement digital recordings of writing workshop. Each week, I interviewed all 14 students informally about their writing while they were engaged in the composing process. In addition, semistructured interviews with all 14 student participants occurred at the end of each writing workshop unit and focused on the writing that the students chose to publish. All interactive read-alouds, literature-based minilessons, and student interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The data sources were analyzed according to Strauss and Corbin's (1990) description of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, and Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method. A grounded theory of reading like a writer and writing like a reader emerged from the data and addressed the social construction of intertextuality and literary understanding within integrated reading and writing events. The grounded theory consisted of seven interrelated, interconnected categories. The first four conceptual categories—*noticing*, *examining*, *guiding*, and *explaining*—emerged from analysis of the interactive read-aloud and literature-based minilesson transcriptions. These conceptual categories formed the *reading like a writer* portion of the grounded theory. The conceptual category of *understanding* emerged from the analysis of the observational transcriptions, as well as the students' writing and semistructured student interviews, and joined the conceptual categories regarding *reading like a writer* and the categories regarding *writing like a reader*. Two broad conceptual categories—*mentoring* and *crafting*—emerged from analysis of the students' writing and semistructured interview transcriptions and formed the *writing like a reader* portion of the grounded theory.

While reading mentor texts, students learned to read like writers as they and their teacher noticed and examined the author's craft. The teacher facilitated the conversation by guiding students' responses and explaining the purpose of craft features as well as pur-

posefully and explicitly interconnecting students' reading and writing experiences. The interactive nature of the read-alouds and subsequent minilessons led students to develop a thorough understanding of how authors craft their writing as well as how particular craft features influenced them as readers. This understanding of how writers craft their writing in particular ways for their readers led students to write like readers as they took into consideration the many textual resources available in their learning environments. Numerous texts interacting within the literacy environment, including the writing and illustrations within the mentor texts and the teacher and students' interactions throughout writing workshop, mentored students' writing. As students wrote during writing workshop, they crafted their writing from the perspective of a reader and wrote with a reader in mind. Students' literary understanding facilitated their ability to think critically about their writing and perceive reading and writing as a combined literacy process (Manak, 2009).

My findings suggest that the dialogic interactions among participants within interactive read-alouds were significant in developing a literary understanding that influenced students' writing as well as their writing ability and process. Therefore, the conversation that occurs between teachers and students when interactively reading a children's book needs to be carefully considered. Teachers can thoughtfully guide the conversation by extending students' responses and taking advantage of teachable moments to enhance students' understanding of an author's craft and the interconnected nature of reading and writing. Within this study, the teacher and students were a community of writers who learned how to craft their writing from published authors as well as from each other. Therefore, it is important for teachers to help students to perceive themselves as writers and foster the various mentoring relationships within the literacy classroom.

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